

2004

Skepticism, rhetoric, and Nietzsche: an examination of the skeptical underpinnings of postmodern rhetoric

Thaddeus Jay Patterson
Iowa State University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/rtd>



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#), and the [Rhetoric and Composition Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Patterson, Thaddeus Jay, "Skepticism, rhetoric, and Nietzsche: an examination of the skeptical underpinnings of postmodern rhetoric" (2004). *Retrospective Theses and Dissertations*. 16162.
<https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/rtd/16162>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Iowa State University Capstones, Theses and Dissertations at Iowa State University Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Retrospective Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Iowa State University Digital Repository. For more information, please contact digirep@iastate.edu.

**Skepticism, rhetoric, and Nietzsche: An examination of the
skeptical underpinnings of postmodern rhetoric**

by

Thaddeus Jay Patterson

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
MASTER OF ARTS

Major: Rhetoric, Composition, and Professional Communication

Program of Study Committee:
Michael Mendelson, Major Professor
Carl Herndl
Robert Hollinger

Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

2004

Copyright © Thaddeus Jay Patterson, 2004. All rights reserved.

Graduate College
Iowa State University

This is to certify that the master's thesis of

Thaddeus Jay Patterson

has met the thesis requirements of Iowa State University

Major Professor

For the Major Program

For my parents whose unconditional love and support made this possible.

Table of Contents

Introduction: Rhetoric is on the Rise, but Why?.....	1
Chapter 1: The Hellenistic Skeptics And The Doubting of The Value of Truth	7
Chapter 2: Nietzsche's Perspectivism.....	20
Chapter 3: Postmodern Rhetoric and the Fulfillment of Skepticism's Promise	33
Bibliography.....	46

Introduction: Rhetoric is on the Rise, but Why?

Stanley Fish says that rhetoric is ascending:

As I write, the fortunes of rhetorical man are on the upswing, as in discipline after discipline there is evidence of what has been called the interpretive turn, the realization (at least for those it seizes) that the givens of any field of activity—including the facts it commands, the procedures it trusts in, and the values it expresses and extends—are socially and politically constructed, are fashioned by man rather than delivered by God or Nature. (Fish 485)

With this short passage Fish explains how rhetoric is benefiting from the move away from absolute, discovered truth. When the givens are “socially and politically constructed,” rhetoric, previously relegated to communicating already discovered truths, becomes the method of determining what is true. Under this paradigm, eventually, every question dissolves into a question of assumptions or givens, and these assumptions are constructed rhetorically as people reach agreements. Hence, questions about the core values of any field dissolve into questions of discourse.

Rhetoric’s Ascendancy Comes from Nietzsche’s Skepticism

But what is causing the current ascendancy of rhetoric? What is going on right now that makes postmodernists choose to look at the world as socially constructed? From a rhetorical stance, this question is asking why people are agreeing to abandon belief in absolute Truth. In order to answer this question, I will try to investigate the beginning of this movement, to see if I can understand what arguments made the abandonment of absolute

truth persuasive. James Hikins suggests that my investigation should start with Nietzsche, because so much of postmodern rhetoric is based on Nietzsche:

The theoretical beginning points for the views of all these central figures [Althusser, Bataille, Blanchot, Cixous, Deleuze, de Man, Derrida, Foucault, Irigaray, Kristeva, Lacan, Lyotard] in postmodern rhetoric lie in a particular interpretation of Nietzsche's theory of truth. Specifically, it is the German philosopher's purported Skepticism that provides these theorists with the basis for subsequent claims concerning rhetoric, knowledge, power, the nature of language, ideology, and ethics. (381 Hikins' italics)

If Hikins is correct, then Nietzsche would be a good place to start examining the cause of rhetoric's contemporary broadening of scope. Furthermore, Hikins suggests that it is Nietzsche's Skepticism that provides the basis for postmodern rhetoric. Therefore, it is not Nietzsche alone, but also Skepticism, that needs to be understood to comprehend rhetoric's ascendancy.

Beyond Objectivism and Relativism

However, Skepticism is an old idea, so there must be something different about Nietzsche's Skepticism to explain the widening scope of rhetoric. In the chapter of *In Doing What Comes Naturally* in which Fish discusses how rhetoric is on the upswing, he also discusses Skepticism, if not under that name. But a more rigorous explanation of Skepticism can be found in Richard J. Bernstein's *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis*.

In that book Bernstein outlines a dichotomy between relativism and objectivism. For Bernstein, objectivism is:

the basic conviction that there is or must be some permanent, ahistorical matrix or framework to which we can ultimately appeal in determining the nature of rationality, knowledge, truth, reality, goodness, or rightness. (8)

Whereas,

the relativist not only denies the positive claims of the objectivist but goes further. In its strongest form, relativism is the basic conviction that when we turn to the examination of those concepts that philosophers have taken to be the most fundamental—whether it is the concept of rationality, truth, reality, right, the good, or norms—we are forced to recognize that in the final analysis all such concepts must be understood as relative to a specific conceptual scheme, theoretical framework, paradigm, form of life, society, or culture. (8)

With these definitions, it seems clear that Bernstein's relativist and Fish's rhetorical man are similar creatures. But, Bernstein does not speak in favor of relativism. As the title suggests, Bernstein is seeking something beyond the dichotomy of objectivism and relativism. To be fair, Fish seems to be suggesting the same thing, although he suggests it through a refined understanding of relativism.

Bernstein writes that the whole division of objectivism and relativism is a false Either/ Or, which he refers to as the "Cartesian Anxiety":

With a chilling clarity Descartes leads us with an apparent and ineluctable necessity to a grand and seductive Either/Or. *Either* there is some support for our being, a fixed foundation for our knowledge, *or* we cannot escape the forces of darkness that envelop us with madness, with intellectual and moral chaos. (18)

Bernstein and Fish both suggest that this Either/Or is false. Just because there is no “fixed foundation” does not mean that knowledge is impossible or that morality is meaningless.

Fish advances this point clearly when he discusses force:

That is to say, force wears the aspect of anarchy only if one regards it as an empty blind urge, but if one identifies it as *interest aggressively pursued*, force acquires a content and that content is a complex of goals and purposes, underwritten by a vision, and put into operation by a detailed agenda complete with steps, stages, and directions. Force, in short, is already a repository of everything it supposedly threatens—norms, standards reasons, and, yes, even rules. (522)

Here Fish suggests that individual viewpoints pursued without connection to universal truths (what he refers to as force) do not lead to “moral and intellectual chaos.” Instead, even when the absence of absolute Truth leaves people with only their personal agendas, those personal agendas already contain the values, morals, and standards that Descartes depended on.

Uncertainty, Incommensurability, and Judgment

This brings us back to Skepticism. Clearly Skepticism is salutary for rhetoric; but just as clearly, if Skepticism is perceived as leading to moral darkness or anarchy, it will be abandoned for the illusion of absolute Truth. Therefore, for a form of Skepticism to become rhetorically attractive, it must move beyond objectivism and relativism. My claim in this paper is that postmodern rhetoric is the result of a revival of Skepticism that moves beyond objectivism and relativism. Furthermore, by examining three concepts—uncertainty, incommensurability, and judgment—and how they operate under various forms of Skepticism, I will attempt to show not only how this reconstructed Skepticism has moved beyond objectivism and relativism, but also why this neo-Skepticism has proven such an

attractive source for postmodern rhetoric. First, though, I will outline what I mean by uncertainty, incommensurability, and judgment.

Uncertainty

Perhaps certainty can be effectively described as a situation not requiring judgment. For a form of Skepticism to have the requisite uncertainty, it must eschew the need for universal truth and the assumption of universal truth. If a universal standard existed, then that standard would be the measure of the value of any idea. Whereas, without any such standard, human judgment is the final arbiter between incommensurable perspectives.

Incommensurability

Incommensurability is the idea that two systems can be constructed without any universal way of differentiating them. Furthermore, incommensurability can only exist if neither system can be understood in terms of the other, nor both systems understood in terms of a third. Skepticism and incommensurability are ineluctably intertwined. If all perspectives were commensurable, then there would be no need for Skepticism, because every perspective could be understood in terms of any other perspective and could then be judged by the standards of that perspective. However, given incommensurability, only judgment is left to distinguish between perspectives.

Judgment

Judgment is the human ability to choose among various incommensurable views, even when no external or objective standard of doing so exists. Only when judgment brings rules, values, standards, and norms to perspectives can Skepticism seem tenable. Without faith that human judgment (absent the assistance of a universal standard or method) can

choose wisely between incommensurable perspectives, Skepticism is too unattractive a theory to gain the adherence of any but absolute Nihilists. Therefore, judgment is key to Skepticism.

Partitio

For the remainder of this paper, I will examine how uncertainty, incommensurability, and judgment make Skepticism rhetorically attractive, and in so doing how they bring about the broadening of rhetoric that Fish and others claim distinguishes the postmodern world.

In Chapter One, I will look at the Hellenistic Skeptics who dared to question the value of truth and in so doing opened the door for epistemologies that did not seek fixed foundations of universal truth. In Chapter Two, I will examine how Nietzsche also questioned the value of truth and how his perspectivism suggested that rhetoric and Skepticism could go beyond objectivism and relativism. Finally, in Chapter Three, I will examine how Stanley Fish and Thomas Kuhn make good on the promise of Skepticism and expand the scope of rhetoric.

My goal in this inquiry is to critique the assumptions of postmodern rhetoric. The idea that the foundations of knowledge are tentative agreements and not universal truths is just one more tentative assumption and agreement. A better understanding of why that agreement has been reached is my ultimate goal for this paper.

Chapter 1: The Hellenistic Skeptics And The Doubting of The Value of Truth

Two Millennia before Nietzsche asked, “*What* in us really wants “truth”?” (BGE¹ 1) and ushered in postmodern sensibility, the Hellenistic Skeptics had already decided that truth was not their goal. In this chapter I will examine three aspects of Skepticism that are crucial for rhetorical theory—uncertainty, incommensurability, and judgment—by examining the Hellenistic Skeptics and their challenge to truth as an ultimate value.

In order to show how the Hellenistic Skeptics open the door for rhetoric, I must first define what I mean by Skepticism. Next, I will provide a brief history of the Hellenistic Skeptics, followed by a brief discussion of their ideas. Finally I will close with an analysis of how the themes of uncertainty, incommensurability, and judgment play themselves out in the Hellenistic Skeptics.

¹ In following with the conventions of my sources, especially Alexander Nehamas’s *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, I am abbreviating Nietzsche’s works. These are the abbreviations Nehamas lists in the beginning of his book:

<i>A</i>	<i>The Antichrist</i>
<i>BGE</i>	<i>Beyond Good and Evil</i>
<i>EH</i>	<i>Ecce Homo</i>
<i>GM</i>	<i>On the Genealogy of Morals</i>
<i>GS</i>	<i>The Gay Science</i>
<i>HH</i>	<i>Human, All-Too-Human</i>
<i>TI</i>	<i>Twilight of the Idols</i>
<i>TL</i>	<i>On Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense (Not on the Nehamas list)</i>
<i>WP</i>	<i>The Will to Power</i>

With the exception of *TL*, I refer to Nietzsche’s work by the section number, not page number.

A Definition of Skepticism

Skepticism is Doubt Without the Assumption of Truth

Nietzsche says “One should not be deceived: Great spirits are Skeptics. Zarathustra is a Skeptic” (A 54). But what does it mean to be a Skeptic? For many historians and philosophers the key element to Skepticism is doubt. Doubt has played many roles in philosophy, but I am claiming something beyond its usual extensions for Skepticism. I am using Skepticism here to mean doubt without the assumption of underlying truth. Socrates expresses doubt in Plato’s *Apology*, with his claim “I am better off than he is,—for he knows nothing, and thinks that he knows; I neither know nor think that I know” (64). But with his Forms, Socrates still believes that there is something to be known. As integral as doubt is to Socrates, he still believes in a Truth that can be the measure of ideas; hence, he is no true Skeptic.

Another great doubter is Descartes, who says in his *Principles of Philosophy*, “[t]hat in order to investigate the truth of things it is necessary once in one’s life to put all things in doubt insofar as that is possible. That it is useful too to regard as false those things which one can doubt” (qtd. Annas 8). Descartes’ doubt also has a limit, though: “we should certainly not use this doubt for the conduct of our actions” (qtd. Annas 8). For Descartes, then, doubt was a tool, but continual doubt was not desired. Julia Annas and Jonathan Barnes state that Descartes’ feelings against Skepticism go further: “Descartes saw Skepticism as a disease of epidemic magnitude: his whole philosophical activity was given to the search for a cure” (Annas 6).

Life Without Assumptions Impossible

Hume, another famous doubter, echoes Descartes' idea that doubt must be divorced from actions, albeit more eloquently and forcefully, when he maintains that a Skeptic of the Pyrrhonist tradition cannot follow his philosophy in real life:

On the contrary, he must acknowledge, if he will acknowledge any thing, that all human life must perish, were his principles universally and steadily to prevail. All discourse, all action would immediately cease; and men remain in total lethargy, till the necessities of nature, unsatisfied, put an end to their miserable existence. It is true; so fatal an event is very little to be dreaded. Nature is always too strong for principle. And though a PYRRHONIAN may throw himself or others into a momentary amazement and confusion by his profound reasonings; the first and most trivial event in life will put to flight all his doubts and scruples, and leave him the same, in every point of action and speculation, with the philosophers of every other sect, or with those who never concerned themselves in any philosophical researches. When he awakes from his dream, he will be the first to join in the laugh against himself, and to confess, that all his objections are mere amusement, and can have no other tendency than to show the whimsical condition of mankind, who must act and reason and believe; though they are not able, by their most diligent enquiry, to satisfy themselves concerning the foundations of these operations, or to remove objections, which may be raised against them. (Hume 207)

Here, Hume, even while acknowledging that certainty cannot be achieved, still maintains that doubts must cease at some point if life is to continue. Despite, then, the essential role doubt

played for Descartes and Hume, they both look at Skepticism negatively. For Descartes and Hume, doubting is necessary, but it must be limited.

What is impressive in Hume is that even when he admits that doubts cannot be satisfied, he still advocates the surrender of these doubts. Leo Groarke interprets Hume as differentiating himself from the Hellenistic Skeptics by saying that he and those like him “respond to Skeptical conclusions in a different way. For though they conclude that a belief in the external world, the principles of reason, and so forth cannot be justified, they still accept them” (13). So, instead of giving up on beliefs because they cannot be proven beyond doubt, Hume accepts his beliefs, even while accepting his inability to prove them. Furthermore, Groarke says of Hume that “though he concludes that there is no way to justify the senses, causal inference, and reasoning in general, he still claims that ordinary life and human nature do not allow us to reject them” (13). Here Groarke seems to be saying that Hume believes that the assumptions necessary for life are true, even while admitting doubt.

Cicero says almost the same thing in his *Academica*:

For even though many difficulties hinder every branch of knowledge, and both the subjects themselves and our faculties of judgement involve such a lack of certainty that the most ancient and learned thinkers had good reason for distrusting their ability to discover what they desired, nevertheless they did not give up, nor yet will we abandon in exhaustion our zeal for research; and the sole object of our discussions is by arguing on both sides to draw out and give shape to some result that may be either true or the nearest possible approximation to the truth. Nor is there any difference between ourselves and those who think that they have positive knowledge except that they have no doubt that their tenets are true, whereas we hold many doctrines as

probable, which we can easily act upon but can scarcely advance as certain. (473-475)

Here, Cicero continues to doubt even while he works to come as close as possible to truth. But, like Hume, while he acknowledges that doubts cannot be satisfied, he seems to require either truth or at least the assumption of truth.

The Distinction Between Believing in Assumptions and Acting on Them

My discussion of Hume and Cicero allows me to make a distinction between their beliefs and Skepticism. I am interpreting Hume and Cicero here to be saying that they believe their working assumptions in everyday life are true, even when they accept that they cannot prove them. Instead, the Skeptics and Nietzsche can act on their assumptions without the belief that these assumptions have *anything to do with truth*. For example, Nietzsche says, “The falseness of a judgment is for us not necessarily an objection to a judgment; in this respect our new language may sound strangest. The question is to what extent it is life-promoting, life-preserving, species-preserving, perhaps even species-cultivating” (*BGE* 4). In this quote Nietzsche clearly differentiates himself from Hume and Cicero in that he knowingly accepts judgments that are probably not true but that are still necessary to life. This seemingly trivial distinction will become more important later.

To sum up, I am defining Skepticism as an epistemological position in which doubt about all things is constant. Furthermore, although Skepticism accepts assumptions as necessary for survival, it also involves thinking of those assumptions as no more true for that necessity. Therefore, with the Skeptic, the truth, previously the ultimate goal of other epistemologies, is now simply one of the many human measures of an idea.

Having defined how I will use the term Skepticism in this paper, I would like to investigate its role for the original Hellenistic Skeptics.

The Original Pyrrhonists

My discussion of Hellenistic Skepticism will begin with Pyrrho, born in approximately 365 B.C.E. (Long 79). According to David Sedley, Pyrrho's major influence on later Skeptics, who eventually began calling themselves Pyrrhonists, was to look at *epochē* (the suspension of assent) as a goal—essentially he was among the first to doubt the value of truth and posit as a goal in the search of knowledge something other than truth: i.e. in the case of Pyrrho, the *telos* of any inquiry was *ataraxia* (freedom from disturbance) (15). *Ataraxia* was attained through *epochē*; only by refusing to decide between opposed ideas, could the Skeptic be free from disturbance. With his idea of *ataraxia* and a life without truth as a goal, Pyrrho was able to serve as an example for later Skeptics, despite the fact that he wrote nothing. Although his views were disseminated by his pupil, Timon, Pyrrho founded no school; so the next phase of Greek Skepticism took place in the Academy.

Arcesilaus became head of the Academy about 265 B.C.E. and combined the rigor of Plato and Socrates with the *ataraxia* and *epochē* of Pyrrho. According to A. A. Long, Arcesilaus thought the Academy should return to “the dispassionate and undogmatic inquiry” he saw in Plato and Socrates. The main idea Arcesilaus takes from Plato and Socrates was the idea that nothing could be known for certain (Long 88-89). Arcesilaus takes this idea even further by adding the notion that we cannot even be sure we know nothing (Long 91). By combining the goals of Pyrrho with the dialectic methods of Plato and Socrates, Arcesilaus gave the Skeptical Academy its philosophical rigor.

Under Arcesilaus, the Academic Skeptics were in conflict with the Stoics. This conflict continued into the second century B.C.E. under Carneades' leadership of the Academy. Throughout the first century B.C.E., the Stoic and Skeptic traditions move towards each other. During this period, "the Pyrrhonist movement properly so called is founded by Aenesidemus, a renegade Academic determined to resist the new developments" (Burnyeat, "Intro" 6). Aenesidemus also added a systematic method of doubt to Skepticism—his famous modes of Skepticism. According to Long, "The 'modes' are a series of arguments designed to show that 'suspension of judgment' should be our attitude towards all things claimed to be real or true in any objective sense" (75). Aenesidemus' movement continued for over two hundred years. Then, shortly after Sextus Empiricus (around 200 A.D.), the Pyrrhonist tradition faded out (Burnyeat, "Intro" 6).

The Ideas of the Pyrrhonists

As might be expected of a "movement" devoted to disbelief and suspension of assent, the views of the Skeptics vary considerably. Instead of trying to examine the variety of Skeptical stances, I will look at two aspects of Pyrrhonist thought that anticipate Nietzsche's Skepticism. The first idea I will examine is uncertainty.

Although Nietzsche seems to feel no one before him had asked why certainty was better than uncertainty, the ancient Skeptics not only asked that question, but some, starting with Pyrrho, chose uncertainty. (*BGE* 1) The second idea I will examine is the value of appearances, because both Nietzsche and the Pyrrhonist Skeptics use the idea of appearances to cope with an uncertain world.

Uncertainty as Desirable

Sedley writes,

What above all characterizes Hellenistic Skepticism is...its abandonment of that desire [the desire for knowledge]—its radical conviction that to suspend assent and to resign oneself to ignorance is not a bleak expedient but, on the contrary, a highly desirable intellectual achievement. (10)

In other words, the Hellenistic Skeptics desired uncertainty. Furthermore, Sedley's discussion of Arcesilaus argues that although other thinkers had already used the idea of suspending assent, it was different with Arcesilaus:

His [Arcesilaus's] method of including '*epochē* about all things' was in essence borrowed from Plato's early Socratic dialogues...Plato had harnessed his method to the search for knowledge, the Peripatetics had valued theirs as a rhetorical training device, and Protagoras had probably put his to work in support of his relativistic theory of truth. (Sedley 11)

So the method of opposing arguments was not new. What distinguished Arcesilaus from the others was that he was only seeking *epochē*, the suspension of assent, not something beyond it. However, Arcesilaus did not invent *epochē* as a goal on his own. It came from Pyrrho.

According to Long,

the second feature of Pyrrhonism which marks its contemporary character is the ethical goal, 'freedom from disturbance.' No one had previously suggested that Skepticism might be made the basis of a moral theory. This was Pyrrho's innovation. (79)

Pyrrho's goal of *ataraxia* is looked at by both Long and Sedley as his key innovation (Long 79; Sedley 15). This innovation is a very early example of questioning the value of truth.

With Arcesilaus, the dialectical, disputative methods of Socrates are combined with Pyrrho's desire for freedom from assent, and an antilogical philosophy is formed with a goal other than truth.

With *epochē* as the goal, incommensurability becomes possible, because *epochē* and incommensurability are more or less complementary. Put another way, with the Skeptical goal of *epochē*, incommensurability is to be desired. The Skeptical goals of *ataraxia* and *epochē* are only attainable if incommensurability is assumed. Commensurable theories can be resolved, therefore assent is not suspended—no *epochē*. And, without *epochē*, there is no *ataraxia*. So, by questioning the value of truth and favoring *epochē*, the Skeptics generate a worldview that allows for multiple acceptable perspectives. By striving for *epochē*, there is no drive to make all viewpoints commensurable, nor is there a quest for the one universal standard. Nor is there despair about being unable to find the "Truth."

But how do Skeptics operate without belief? This question brings us to the issue of appearances.

Appearances Allow the Skeptics to Act Without Belief in Their Assumptions

I have said earlier that assumptions are necessary for life and that what distinguishes the Skeptics from Hume and Cicero is that the Skeptics do not believe that their assumptions, while necessary, are either true or approximately true. One way that the Skeptics maintain this disparity between their assumptions and the external world is by valorizing the role of appearances. Long outlines Pyrrho's argument against theories of knowledge that seek to understand the "real nature of (external) objects." Essentially, we cannot understand the

external world save through our senses, and our senses provide no evidence that we perceive things as they really are. “Sense-perception reveals ‘what appears’ to the percipient; but ‘what appears’ cannot be used as sound evidence from which to infer ‘what is’ (81-82). Hence, “The judgments which the Pyrrhonist outlaws are exclusively claims to know about things-in-themselves” (Long 85).

The Pyrrhonist is able to survive because he has the criterion of ‘the object as perceived’ (Long 86) to make decisions with; but this object as perceived does not lead the Pyrrhonist to make conclusions about the real world. Myles Burnyeat writes that for the Skeptic, “All belief is unreasonable precisely because...all belief concerns real existence as opposed to appearance” (“Can the Sceptic” 27). This comment suggests that the Skeptics deny beliefs, because beliefs are thought to correspond to things-in-themselves. However, Skeptics can still make assumptions that correspond only with appearances.

By not necessarily thinking that their personal perspective implies the truth of their perceptions, the Pyrrhonist anticipates Nietzsche’s argument:

Life no argument: We have arranged for ourselves a world in which we can live—by positing bodies, lines, planes, causes and effects, motion and rest, form and content; without these articles of faith nobody could now endure life. But that does not prove them. Life is no argument. The conditions of life might include error. (Nietzsche *GS*, 121 qtd. in Nehamas 53)

Nietzsche here illustrates the power of appearances to enable the Skeptic to survive without any belief about the real world. Through appearances the Skeptic can gain enough understanding to make judgments while still suspending assent about the truth. Therefore,

the Skeptic can remain in doubt about conflicting viewpoints, yet still make decisions based on his or her individual judgment.

Taken together, these ideas about doubt and appearance have implications for the Skeptical view of uncertainty, incommensurability, and judgment, which I will examine in the remainder of the chapter.

Uncertainty

Since Skepticism is perhaps best understood as an attack on certainty, the ramifications of the Hellenistic ideas for certainty are easy enough to identify. The most important issue, though, is that the Skeptics propose a goal for their epistemology other than certainty. As long as certainty remained a goal to strive for, questions would revolve around accuracy; but as soon as the value of certainty was doubted, other values could be examined—including why accuracy was esteemed.

This aspect of the Skeptics' stance against certainty makes room for other questions. With truth as possible, the question asked would always be, "Is it true?" or "How close is it to the truth?" With truth no longer on the table, on the other hand, the questions about for whom something is true, why something is considered to be true, or what value there is in certain criteria for truth now come to the forefront. Or as Nietzsche put it two thousand years later, "it is high time to replace the Kantian question, "How are synthetic judgments *a priori* possible?" by another question, "Why is belief in such judgments *necessary*?" (*BGE* 11). The answers to these questions will inevitably involve rhetoric, because the answers must be negotiated.

Incommensurability

The *epochē* of the Skeptic implies incommensurability. By looking at *epochē* as an end, the Hellenistic Skeptics were advocating a place where opposing arguments could not be reconciled or subsumed under a larger viewpoint. Multiple, opposing arguments may exist on every decision, and simply putting them together, as the Skeptics advocate, implies that they can be compared.

Furthermore, the Skeptics believe that no universal criterion exists to differentiate opposed arguments, as the Skeptic argues:

there is no intellectually satisfactory criterion we can trust and use—this is the real backbone of the discussion, corresponding to a modern sceptic’s attempt to show we have no adequate way of telling when things really are as they appear to be, and hence no adequate assurance against mistaken judgments. (Burnyeat 24)

But, believing that there is no certain way to protect against mistaken judgment does not imply there is no rational way to distinguish between arguments. A Skeptic can still act on assumptions. These assumptions, for example a scientific paradigm, do not function as universal criteria, but can and do serve as bases for personal judgments.

Judgment

Although the Skeptics make little explicit reference to judgment, their views on certainty and incommensurability make a few elements of judgment necessary. First, if a Skeptic looks at any issue and constructs two equally potent arguments, one on either side of the issue, then, of necessity, deciding between the two issues will require a judgment based on personal perspective. But, rather than trying to find the right answer through *a priori* reasoning, Skeptics make decisions based on their interests. In any situation with multiple

equally-correct stances, taking a stance is a matter of saying, “Hear me! For I am such and such a person. Above all, do not mistake me for someone else” (Nietzsche *EH* I, 1). This feeling of power would necessarily be lacking if decisions were made based entirely upon timeless reasoning; in that case, the decision would not be the person’s but rather would follow logically from the independent process of reason alone.

Rhetorical Implications

The implications of Skepticism for rhetoric are profound. With Skepticism, all of the big questions, such as whether a theory is true, eventually dissolve into incommensurable arguments, and the only way to choose between them is through persuasion and judgment. So, if Skepticism is accepted, all questions, be they scientific, philosophical, or merely practical, become matters of persuasion and judgment.

But the Skeptics weren’t rhetoricians, so the story of how rhetoric takes its place as the arbiter of Skeptical doubt must wait. For now, in Chapter Two, it is important to see how Nietzsche expands on the ideas of the Hellenistic Skeptics. With Nietzsche’s continued attack on the value of truth as a goal for inquiry, and his more detailed approach to the idea of appearances, rhetoric finds a Skeptical underpinning that allows it to answer the big questions. In Chapter Three, I will examine how rhetoric finally begins to answer these questions.

Chapter 2: Nietzsche's Perspectivism

To sum up, in the previous chapter I explored how the Hellenistic Skeptics doubted certainty and yet survived in an uncertain world through a reliance on appearances. By doubting the value of truth, and even positing uncertainty as a goal, Pyrrho introduced the possibility of an epistemology that did not seek certainty. But Pyrrho failed to convince many generations and his school of thought mostly died out, if only for a time. Later, Nietzsche revisited the doubting of truth and, by taking Skepticism beyond objectivism and relativism, made it an attractive epistemology on which to base a new approach to rhetoric.

In this chapter, I will examine how Nietzsche blended the philosophy of the Hellenistic Skeptics with his idea of perspectivism. With perspectivism, Nietzsche brought Skepticism beyond objectivism and relativism, making it an attractive epistemology on which to base postmodern rhetoric. In my examination of how Nietzsche's perspectivism makes Skepticism persuasive, I will first describe perspectivism itself and then look at how uncertainty, incommensurability, and judgment operate under the conditions of Nietzschean perspectivism. But first, I must address the connection I am making between Nietzsche and the Pyrrhonists.

Nietzsche's Connection to the Pyrrhonists

Nietzsche is not usually connected to the Pyrrhonists; even Nietzsche thought he was responding either to the Sophists, who were earlier than the Pyrrhonist Skeptics, or to the philosophers directly before him, such as Kant. However, despite Nietzsche's lack of

attention to the Pyrrhonist Skeptics, they are still relevant to a discussion of Nietzsche because, as Nietzsche writes:

That individual philosophical concepts are not anything capricious or autonomously evolving, but grow up in connection and relationship with each other; that, however suddenly and arbitrarily they seem to appear in the history of thought, they nevertheless belong just as much to a system as all the members of the fauna of a continent—is betrayed in the end also by the fact that the most diverse philosophers keep filling in a definite fundamental scheme of possible philosophies. Under an invisible spell, they always revolve once more in the same orbit; however independent of each other they may feel themselves with their critical or systematic wills, something within them leads them, something impels them in a definite order, one after the other—to wit, the innate systematic structure and relationships of their concepts. (*BGE* 20)

So, though no direct link between the Pyrrhonists' and Nietzsche may exist, Nietzsche and the Pyrrhonists independently fall into the same orbit. Indeed, at the beginning of the section the previous quote was taken from, Nietzsche enters the Pyrrhonian orbit:

What in us really wants “truth”? Indeed we came to a long halt at the question about the cause of this will—until we finally came to a complete stop before a still more basic question. We asked about the *value* of this will. Suppose we want truth: *why not rather* untruth? and uncertainty? even ignorance? ... And though it scarcely seems credible, it finally almost seems to us as if the problem had never even been put so far—as if we were the first to see it, fix it with our eyes, and *risk* it. For it does involve a risk, and perhaps there is none that is greater. (*BGE* 1)

So, despite Nietzsche's feelings of coming up with a new question, the Hellenistic Skeptics, following Pyrrho, previously "put" this problem. Hence, the Pyrrhonist Skeptics are relevant to a discussion of Nietzsche's Skepticism because they, like Nietzsche, question the value of truth. Without truth as a universal standard, rhetoric takes on a new meaning as a method of judging.

Perspectivism Explained

Perspective Inevitable

But what is perspectivism? Perspectivism claims that the lens we view the world through cannot be removed from the world: "The perspective therefore decides the character of the "appearance"! As if a world would still remain over after one deducted the perspective!" (*WP* 567). Perspectivism begins with the acceptance of the Skeptical idea that the senses can tell us nothing about the external world. Then, Nietzsche adds another level of distance between the external world and us. He claims that our language or paradigms are also between us and the external world: "It is this way with all of us concerning language: we believe that we know something about the things themselves when we speak of trees, colors, snow, and flowers; and yet we possess nothing but metaphors for things—metaphors which correspond in no way to the original entities" (*TL* 1174). Furthermore, our values color what we see: "a world viewed according to values; ordered, selected according to values, i.e., in this case according to the viewpoint of utility in regard to the preservation and enhancement of the power of a certain species of animal" (*WP* 567). So according to Nietzsche we have access to only our value-laden interpretations of things and not things-in-themselves.

The Only World that Matters is The Apparent World

But then, Nietzsche's perspectivism takes its most important step and avoids Descartes' unfair Either/Or. Rather than letting the inaccessibility of truth via the senses lead to despair, Nietzsche instead says that only the apparent world matters: "The 'apparent' world is the only one: the 'true' world is merely added by a lie" (*TI* IV, 2); "The antithesis of the apparent world and the true world is reduced to the antithesis 'world' and 'nothing'" (*WP* 567). Here, Nietzsche is clearly saying that for all intents and purposes, the world of things-in-themselves does not exist or is unimportant.

However, even Nietzsche has difficulty explaining how the only world that matters is the world of perspective. The difficulty occurs because Nietzsche believes that there is something else out there, but at the same time he is trying to say that the something else is inaccessible except through perspective and in itself has no value. Therefore, Nietzsche is reduced to using awkward terms, such as "center of force" for intelligent beings and "remainder" for the external world:

Every center of force adopts a perspective towards the entire remainder, i.e., its own particular valuation, mode of action, and mode of resistance. The "apparent world," therefore, is reduced to a specific mode of action on the world, emanating from a center. Now there is no other mode of action whatever; and the "world" is only a word for the totality of these actions. Reality consists precisely in this particular action and reaction of every individual part toward the whole. (*WP* 567)

Notice, the world consists of our actions in relation to the "remainder," not as the "remainder" or our view of the "remainder." By making the world consist of our actions,

Nietzsche makes it impossible to remove perspective, because in this passage, the removal of our interest would be the removal of the world itself.

Perspectivism is Neither Idealism Nor Object Relativism

It is important to note that Nietzsche's perspectivism is neither idealistic nor objectively relativistic. Nietzsche denies the world is wholly a construct of the human mind, as idealists hold, because that would mean that the organs perceiving the world create themselves, which he dismisses as absurd:

And others even say that the external world is the work of our organs? But then our body, as a part of this external world, would be the work of our organs! But then our organs themselves would be—the work of our organs! It seems to me that this is a complete *reductio ad absurdum*, assuming that the concept of *causa sui* is something fundamentally absurd. Consequently, the external world is *not* the work of our organs--? (*BGE* 15)

Rather the world is our interpretation of whatever else is out there. Essentially, Nietzsche is half-idealist, because our minds construct the world, by interpreting what we see and do not construct the world out of nothingness.

Moreover, Nietzsche is not an object relativist because the “Cartesian Anxiety” does not alarm him. Instead of believing the lack of universal criteria makes decision-making impossible, Nietzsche holds that we have never had any such criteria; rather, the sum total of advancement in human knowledge has come through improvements in applying personal, interested judgment. Hence, for Nietzsche, each attempt at universal truth, while perhaps an improvement over earlier attempts, fundamentally misunderstood itself.

Uncertainty, Incommensurability, and Judgment

For the rest of this chapter I will examine how Nietzschean perspectivism relates to the three ideas I raised earlier—uncertainty, incommensurability, and judgment. Finally, by looking at these three ideas and how they relate to perspectivism, I will attempt to show how Nietzsche’s perspectivism expands rhetoric so that it is able to examine questions previously beyond rhetoric’s scope.

Uncertainty

The key element in uncertainty for Nietzsche is not that we cannot be certain—although he still maintains that—but rather that we cannot know neutral facts: “Facts is precisely what there is not, only interpretations” (*WP* 481). For Nietzsche, perspective is inextricably tied to all knowledge, to the degree that:

There is *only* a perspective seeing, *only* a perspective “knowing”; and the *more* affects we allow to speak about one thing, the *more* eyes, different eyes, we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will our “concept” of this thing, our “objectivity,” be. But to eliminate the will altogether, to suspend each and every affect, supposing we were capable of this—what would that mean but to *castrate* the intellect? (*GM* III, 12)

In a sense, Nietzsche is saying here that part of what makes knowledge valuable is the perspective it comes from, so even if we could remove perspective from knowledge, the knowledge left over would be worthless. Nietzsche comes back to this idea when he writes, “as if a world would still remain over after one deducted the perspective!” (*WP* 567).

Alexander Nehamas restates Nietzsche’s emphasis on interpretation: “In itself, the world has no features, and these can therefore be neither correctly nor wrongly represented” (45).

Another aspect of uncertainty in Nietzsche's perspectivism is that it allows him to refute Hume's idea that we must accept the assumptions we live by as true: "Nietzsche claims that many of our most central beliefs are false, and that, far from hurting us, these beliefs have so far produced some of the greatest benefits. But he never argues that their being beneficial makes them true" (Nehamas 55). In this passage, Nehamas points out that Nietzsche does not, like Hume, assume that those judgments we rely upon are true, or even that reliability implies truth. Nietzsche is rather saying that we rely on untruths, but valuable untruths. Nietzsche examines the same idea in the following passage:

The falseness of a judgment is for us not necessarily an objection to a judgment;...
And we are fundamentally inclined to claim that the falsest judgments (which include the synthetic judgments *a priori*) are the most indispensable for us; that without accepting the fictions of logic, without measuring reality against the purely invented world of the unconditional and self-identical, without a constant falsification of the world by means of numbers, man could not live—that renouncing false judgments would mean renouncing life and a denial of life. To recognize untruth as a condition of life. (*BGE* 4)

The specific untruths Nietzsche refers to here, including numbers and logic, are areas previously outside of rhetoric's domain. By saying that these tremendously useful concepts are invented, and as such, are opinions and not knowledge, Nietzsche places them in the realm of rhetoric. In the same way, Nietzsche claims: "*language is rhetoric*, because it desires to convey only a *doxa* [opinion], not an *episteme* [knowledge]" (*Lectures* 23). By claiming that all numbers, logic, and language are opinions and not knowledge—in a sense

created fictions—Nietzsche is arguing that the most important intellectual developments of mankind have no connection to absolute Truth.

All of this leaves Nietzsche with a form of uncertainty that allows for only small truths, truths within a perspective. For example, Nietzsche says, “If I make up the definition of a mammal, and then, after inspecting a camel, declare, “look, a mammal,” I have indeed brought a truth to light in this way, but it is a truth of limited value” (TL 1175). As in Nietzsche’s example with the camel, knowledge can still be judged by very strict criteria, but those criteria are always constructed, always contingent, and always interested. Furthermore, those criteria are neither universal nor does Nietzsche desire that they become so:

It must offend their [Nietzsche’s philosophers of the future] pride, also their taste, if their truth is supposed to be a truth for everyman—which has so far been the secret wish and hidden meaning of all dogmatic aspirations. “My judgment is *my* judgment”: no one else is easily entitled to it—that is what such a philosopher of the future may perhaps say of himself. (*BGE* 43)

Additionally, among other ideas in this passage, Nietzsche indicates that judgments are not and should not be transferable among all different perspectives—an idea that dovetails with incommensurability.

Incommensurability

By assuming that a judgment is not for everyone, Nietzsche is suggesting that the incommensurability of ideas is desirable. If all vantage points were commensurable, then there would be no reason to have different judgments. Instead, Nietzsche makes the classic argument for incommensurability in “On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense” by pointing out that there is no independent standard by which different perspectives can be judged: “the

question of which of these perceptions of the world is the more correct one is quite meaningless, for this would have to have been decided previously in accordance with the criterion of the *correct perception*, which means, in accordance with a criterion which is *not available*” (TL 1176).

In other words, Nietzsche claims that no universal criterion is available to distinguish between different perceptions. Generally, Nietzsche combines the lack of universal criteria with the notion that different people have different values and qualities. For example, “[w]hat serves the higher type of men as nourishment or delectation must almost be poison for a very different and inferior type” (*BGE* 30); “Our highest insights must—and should—sound like follies and sometimes like crimes when they are heard without permission by those who are not predisposed and predestined for them” (*BGE* 30). Therefore Nietzsche’s perspectivism leads to a world where different perspectives cannot be judged from a perspectiveless vantage point, where different perspectives must and should be maintained by different people, and finally, where better and worse perspectives exist. But the perspectives are better and worse only from the vantage of another perspective.

Judgment

Nietzsche’s perspectivism takes away any hope of universal truth by defining the world as perspective; nonetheless, the exercise of reasoned judgment still allows for good decisions to be made. For this to make sense, it must be remembered that values are part of perspective. With values as part of perspective, people are in control of the standards they use to judge things, even though they have no access to universal standards. For example, although Nietzsche maintains that there is no universal standard with which to judge ideas, he would have to agree that throughout history the idea of a universal standard has been used

as a basis for judgment. Nietzsche would claim that this “universal standard” was only a construct of those who used it, but that does not detract from its value:

The falseness of a judgment is for us not necessarily an objection to a judgment;...

And we are fundamentally inclined to claim that the falsest judgments (which include the synthetic judgments *a priori*) are the most indispensable for us; that without accepting the fictions of logic, without measuring reality against the purely invented world of the unconditional and self-identical, without a constant falsification of the world by means of numbers, man could not live—that renouncing false judgments would mean renouncing life and a denial of life. To recognize untruth as a condition of life. (*BGE* 4)

Nietzsche is thus not advocating the dismissal of earlier methods of judgment. He claims that they are fictions, but indispensable nonetheless. Nietzsche argues instead that all earlier methods of judgment be seen for what they are—interested, value-laden, constructs of human creativity. Once reasoning is recognized as interested, Nietzsche can redefine objectivity,

not as “contemplation without interest” (which is a nonsensical absurdity), but as the ability *to control* one’s Pro and Con and to dispose of them, so that one knows how to employ a *variety* of perspectives and affective interpretations in the service of knowledge. (*GM* III, 12)

Therefore Nietzsche does not renounce the idea of objectivity, but only denounces what it was previously thought to denote—a universal or neutral perspective. Instead, for Nietzsche, as the previous quote suggests, objectivism is still an interested perspective, but with values applied consciously.

So, for Nietzsche, judgment is a matter of perspective, and one cannot attain a neutral viewpoint. However, one can improve their own viewpoint by looking at things from different angles and by evaluating their own values.

Rhetorical Implications

In order to examine the rhetorical implications of Nietzsche's perspectivism, I will look at Aristotle's definition of rhetoric: "Rhetoric may be defined as the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion " (181). Nietzsche's perspectivism, by denying access to the world of things-in-themselves, modifies this definition, because the available means of persuasion are the only measures available for any idea. That is, persuasive ideas are not necessarily true, but they appear valid by the standards of those they persuade; however, with the inaccessibility of things-in-themselves, those are the only standards that apply. Therefore, Aristotle's quote, understood in the context of Nietzsche's perspectivism, gives rhetoric a new task: to find what means of persuasion are acceptable in any given field.

For example, Nietzsche says, "It is perhaps just dawning on five or six minds that physics, too, is only an interpretation and exegesis of the world (to suit us, if I may say so!) and *not* a world-explanation" (*BGE* 14). If physics is an interpretation of the world, then the standards, methods, questions, and proofs in physics are all open to doubt. The task of determining these issues must take place through rhetoric. Agreement as to which standards apply must occur before progress occurs, but that agreement is reached through persuasion and judgment—not through appeals to universal, unwavering standards.

With Nietzsche's perspectivism, the first principles of any field are temporarily fixed through discourse. The accepted methods of reasoning, the agreed upon starting points for

conversation, the definition of terms, and any other axiomatic aspect of any field depend on agreement reached through discourse rather than a universal standard. And according to Nietzsche, this agreement is reached by a negotiation between people of different perspectives; in other words, the fundamental questions in any field are decided rhetorically.

Nietzsche's Place in Rhetoric and Skepticism

In the previous chapter, I examined how by doubting the value of truth and having goals other than truth the Skeptics created an epistemology that set the stage for an empowered rhetoric. However, the Skeptics were not rhetoricians and did not cast their arguments in terms of rhetoric. In this chapter, I examined how Nietzsche expanded on the ideas of the Skeptics and made these ideas rhetorical by aligning them with his perspectivism; that is, when everything is interpretation, the assumptions underlying any rational system must be obtained rhetorically. However, despite Nietzsche's heavy valuation of rhetoric, he was still a philosopher and was talking about philosophy, not rhetoric.

In the next chapter I will look at how Nietzsche's perspectivism and its ramifications for incommensurability, uncertainty, and judgment have played out in neo-sophistic rhetoric. James W. Hinkins claims Nietzsche's Skepticism has had a dramatic effect on postmodern rhetoric:

The theoretical beginning points for the views of all these central figures [Althusser, Bataille, Blanchot, Cixous, Deleuze, de Man, Derrida, Foucault, Irigaray, Kristeva, Lacan, Lyotard] in postmodern rhetoric lie in a particular interpretation of Nietzsche's theory of truth. Specifically, it is the German philosopher's purported Skepticism that provides these theorists with the basis for subsequent claims

concerning rhetoric, knowledge, power, the nature of language, ideology, and ethics.

(381 Hikins' italics)

While Hikins gives Nietzsche's Skepticism credit for inspiring all of these figures of postmodern rhetoric, I will look at two other figures—Thomas Kuhn and Stanley Fish.

Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolution* explains how science works without the assumption of truth, and Stanley Fish examines how even without a single "true" interpretation of a law, the legal system can still function. Despite working in drastically different fields—Kuhn in science, where rhetoric was previously excluded, and Fish in law, rhetoric's ancient home—both have largely rhetorical explanations for the world. Moreover, their explanations depend on uncertainty, incommensurability, and judgment.

Chapter 3: Postmodern Rhetoric and the Fulfillment of Skepticism's Promise

Introduction

So far in this paper, I have outlined how the Hellenistic Skeptics and Nietzsche doubted the value of truth. In so doing, I have tried to describe an epistemic tradition that accepted uncertainty. Furthermore, I have examined how both the Ancient Skeptics and Nietzsche construed the critical concepts of uncertainty, incommensurability, and judgment. The last chapter closed with the idea that Nietzsche's perspectivism made discourse the foundation of all disciplines. Consequently, with Nietzsche's perspectivism, rhetoric has a new role to play as the means by which investigations are conducted and fundamental decisions are reached in any field.

In this chapter, I will examine how the Skepticism detailed in the last two chapters has been adapted to the postmodern context. I do so by examining two figures—Thomas Kuhn and Stanley Fish—both of whom embrace rhetoric's epistemic potential while, at the same time, they reject, with Nietzsche and the Skeptics, the need for certainty.

Thomas Kuhn exemplifies how a refined Skepticism provides rhetorical answers in disciplines beyond rhetoric proper. Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* is a rhetorical masterstroke because it explains science, previously perceived as among the least rhetorical disciplines, in terms of rhetoric. Kuhn's reconception of scientific change explains how science progresses without any assumption of absolute certainty. In the end, his new

narrative of scientific progress boils down to the advancement of knowledge through persuasion.

Stanley Fish illustrates how Skepticism has specifically affected the fields of rhetoric and jurisprudence. In *Doing What Comes Naturally* Fish argues that interpretation and law are inseparable. In so doing, Fish explains how the legal system works without recourse to certainty.

After summarizing the main arguments of Kuhn and Fish, I will examine how their ideas give rise to new conceptions of uncertainty, incommensurability, and judgment and how all these ideas inform an approach to rhetoric which revives the values of the Skeptical, Nietzschean tradition.

Summary of Kuhn

Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* attempts to reconsider the cumulative theory of science, which says that science is a gradual refinement of knowledge, with each refinement moving mankind closer to the Truth. Kuhn's research into the history of science suggests a different picture. Although the cumulative theory seems to explain the progress of science as it appears after the fact in textbooks, it cannot explain science as it occurs. Only after the fact can science be seen as progressing towards truth; because until attained, the truth is never known; and even when grasped, what seems like truth is eventually supplanted.

Kuhn replaces progressivist history with his theory of revolutions. He says that science advances through two distinct phases: normal science and revolutions. During periods of normal science, the cumulative theory of science is a relatively good approximation of scientific practice. In periods of normal science, scientists have a concept

of how the world works—what Kuhn refers to as a paradigm—and they attempt to refine this paradigm by gathering data and solving minor problems within the paradigm.

However, in addition to periods of normal science, Kuhn says that there are also scientific revolutions. Rather than continual accumulations and refinements of knowledge, Kuhn argues that the biggest developments in science come from revolutions, which are radical shifts from one paradigm to another. These paradigm shifts arise when an anomaly is found in the research during a period of normal science. An anomaly is something that does not fit the paradigm that is being used to explain it. As scientific theories are necessarily incomplete, there will always be something that does not fit. In other words, “There are always difficulties somewhere in the paradigm-nature fit; most of them are set right sooner or later, often by processes that could not have been foreseen” (Kuhn 82). But sometimes the appearance of an anomaly will provoke crisis, especially if the anomaly prevents the theory from answering important questions.

In the case of an unavoidable anomaly, a new paradigm must be constructed that explains the anomaly. And, here is where Kuhn’s theory substantially varies from earlier works in the history of science. Kuhn says that the new paradigm and the old one are incommensurable. So, there is no universal way to prove that one theory is better than the other and no experiment will necessarily prove one theory superior. Kuhn even goes so far as to mention that the discarded theory is often better in some regards. Instead of proofs, Kuhn says that scientists resort to reasoning outside of either scientific paradigm in order to persuade the rest of their scientific community to accept their paradigm. Standards of judgment and acceptable proofs are part of each paradigm, so the debate must go outside of either scientific paradigm, because otherwise the argument would be hopelessly circular.

Therefore, as Kuhn explains, the decision between paradigms must be made through persuasion or rhetoric:

[W]hatever its force, the status of the circular argument is only that of persuasion. It cannot be made logically or even probabilistically compelling for those who refuse to step into the circle. The premises and values shared by the two parties to a debate over paradigms are not sufficiently extensive for that. As in political revolutions, so in paradigm choice—there is no standard higher than the assent of the relevant community. (94)

By saying that the highest standard in science is the acceptance of the scientific community and by implying that theories progress through arguments over paradigms, Kuhn makes science rhetorical. No longer are scientific theories based entirely upon the external world; they are now based on arguments. However, it must be noted that Kuhn's theory of science does not refute the validity of science by saying it is based *only* upon the judgment of the scientific community.

Rather, Kuhn is arguing that science is productive precisely because of the values of the scientific community. Of course, like other professions, scientists can be swayed by personal motivation; but the most consistent values in science are accuracy, honesty, reproducibility, and the attempt to match theories to nature. Therefore, instead of saying that science's goal is a perfect explanation of the external world, Kuhn says the progress of science is an evolution of theories:

But need there be any such goal? Can we not account for both science's existence and its success in terms of evolution from the community's state of knowledge at any given time? Does it really help to imagine that there is some one full, objective, true

account of nature and that the proper measure of scientific achievement is the extent to which it brings us closer to that ultimate goal? (171)

Here, Kuhn questions the need for certainty in science and implies that all of science's discoveries can be explained without any need to appeal to certainty. Stanley Fish, a rhetorician who has taught in schools of law, finds that the practice of law is by and large analogous to Kuhn's description of science.

Summary of Fish

Fish also illustrates how Skeptical approaches that echo those of the Hellenistic Skeptics and Nietzsche can be used to address rhetorical issues. By examining Fish, I intend to show how Skepticism can explain one of the oldest domains of rhetoric, the courtroom.

The chapter "Force" in the section "Rhetoric" in Fish's *Doing What Comes Naturally* is, on its surface, an argument for the inevitability of interpretation or perspective in the legal system. But, Fish's argument is relevant here because he claims that laws can work without their being any one, correct interpretation. Hence, Fish's argument makes laws uncertain, open to incommensurable interpretations, and based on previous judgments.

Fish begins his argument about interpretation by refuting H. L. A. Hart's idea that interpretation of the law by individuals is tantamount to putting a gun to somebody's head, since both are instances of one person dominating another. Fish explains that for Hart the solution to this violence is determinate rules: "Determinate, in short means settled, complete in and of itself, and therefore in no need of further elaboration or addition. Determinate rules perform as barriers or walls on which is written 'beyond this point interpretation cannot go'" (Fish 505).

According to Fish, Hart appreciates the role of interpretation but he also believes that as long as rules have a determinate core, interpretation cannot go beyond certain bounds. While Fish accepts the idea that the force of interpretation is similar to the force of holding a gun to someone's head ("rhetoric is by definition the forceful presentation of an interested argument—rhetoric is another word for force" [Fish 517]), he does not accept the idea that interpretation can be limited.

For Fish, determinate rules are one more occurrence of certainty, and interpretation is yet another application of human judgment. Like Hume and Descartes, Hart argues that for the law to function, certainty is needed. Fish, however, sides with Nietzsche in saying that certainty is not possible, and that even without certainty laws can work. Fish's argument has three key points. First, he argues that each rule is just an earlier interpretation. Second, the application of any rule requires further interpretation, because the circumstances surrounding the particular application of the rule cannot be extracted from or imagined by the rule itself. Finally, Fish steps away from the matter of legal cases and argues that interpretation is not to be feared, because interpretation involves the values agreed upon by a community of informed citizens.

Rules are Just Earlier Interpretations

To begin his argument, Fish claims that rules are just earlier interpretations. He argues that "plain cases," which serve as examples for later cases, are only plain because the arguments about them have been forgotten:

A plain case is a case that was once *argued*; that is, its configurations were once in dispute; at a certain point one characterization of its meaning and significance –of its

rule—was found to be more persuasive than its rivals; and at *that* point the case became settled, became perspicacious, became undoubted, became plain. (513)

Here Fish argues that the clear precedents that Hart sees as the foundation of law are merely arguments that were previously decided. In effect, the foundation that Hart advocates as a way to avoid interpretation is only an interpretation that was so persuasive that its detractors have been forgotten. Fish's argument thus echoes Nietzsche's argument about language and truth:

What then is truth? A movable host of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms: in short, a sum of human relations which have been poetically and rhetorically intensified, transferred, and embellished, and which after long usage, seem to a people to be fixed, canonical, and binding. Truths are illusions which we have forgotten are illusions; they are metaphors that have become worn out and have been drained of sensuous force. (TL 1174)

Nietzsche is saying the same thing about truth that Fish was saying about "plain cases." In these similar passages, the authors are trying to explain how any seemingly stable point in an argument is a place that was previously unstable, previously argued, and always open to continual questioning.

Every New Case Requires a New Interpretation

Moreover, Fish says that in choosing how to apply a precedent to a pending case, the judge is reinterpreting and even rewriting the precedent:

[W]hile there will always be paradigmatically plain cases—Hart is absolutely right to put them at the center of the adjudicative process—far from providing a stay against the force of interpretation, they [plain cases] will be precisely the result of

interpretation's force; for they will have been written and rewritten by interpretive efforts. (513)

Fish agrees here with Hart: plain cases, or precedents, should be used in legal cases, but he disagrees with the idea that they can be used to eliminate interpretation. Fish says instead that each time precedents are applied the case changes to some degree. Alexander Nehamas interprets Nietzsche as saying something similar:

There is therefore no question of ever being accurate or true to a text, since without an interpretation already in place, there is nothing for it to be true *to*. Furthermore, once an interpretation has been offered, to discuss the possibility that it is true is simply to produce a further interpretation of the text in question, which will itself create its own meaning for it. (62)

Here Nehamas attributes to Nietzsche the same argument Fish is making about legal precedents, namely that any text is in a sense created by the interpretation of it. And, as Fish says, “there will be not one but many rules and no *independent* mechanism for deciding between them” (Fish 511-512). For example, Fish makes the argument that part of applying any precedent to a current case is to decide in what ways the precedent is similar to the case at hand. This, of course, remains a matter of interpretation: “resemblance and its opposite—that is, sameness and difference—are not immanent in the object but emerge from the perspective of the differential criteria that inform perception” (Fish 514).

Fish thus claims that applying any precedent is always a matter of interpretation. Rather than plain cases being a way around interpretation, Fish has shown that they are simply earlier interpretations that are reinterpreted in their present application. So in effect, the rules that Hart was clinging to as a way to get beyond the interpretations of judges turn

out to be merely new interpretations of previous interpretations. Or, as Fish puts it, “the rule, insofar as it is intelligible, is an extension of some interested agenda that cannot be kept out because it is already in” (Fish 519).

Norms and Rules Come With Interpretation

But Fish does not say interpretation leads to the anarchy Hart fears. Rather, Fish, like Nietzsche, has an expanded view of interpretation that subsumes the goals of certainty under the heading of perspectives:

That is to say, force wears the aspect of anarchy only if one regards it as an empty blind urge, but if one identifies it as *interest aggressively pursued*, force acquires a content and that content is a complex of goals and purposes, underwritten by a vision, and put into operation by a detailed agenda complete with steps, stages, and directions. Force, in short, is already a repository of everything it supposedly threatens—norms, standards reasons, and, yes, even rules. (522)

Here, Fish reinterprets the meaning of interpretation and, in so doing, addresses a major objection to Skepticism. Hart sees force or interpretation as irrational desires and capricious whims; Fish sees interpretation as value-laden. Of course Hart wants to remove from law all instances of jurors deciding cases on a whim, so he tries to remove interpretation, which he sees as based only on whim. But Fish argues that a world without absolute truth is faceable, because interpretation and the perspective on which it is based are replete with values, such as justice, honesty, and goodwill. So, although judges rewrite the precedents through their interpretations of new cases, and although this process will always reflect their own interests, part of their interest is in interpreting the precedent with justice and good will.

Uncertainty, Incommensurability, and Judgment

Now I will examine how uncertainty, incommensurability, and judgment as discussed in the last two chapters play out in Kuhn and Fish.

Uncertainty

The previous sections argue that Kuhn and Fish both found their theories of scientific and legal reasoning, respectively, on the notion that all decisions are based on uncertain premises. Both Kuhn's paradigms and Fish's precedents are constructed through argument and rely on no higher authority than the agreement of concerned parties. Moreover, the application and modification of each paradigm or precedent is subject to change through further arguments. Distinctively, both theories avoid relying on certainty. No correct interpretation of the law or ideal paradigm in science is assumed in either theory. But, no correct interpretation is needed. Practitioners of law and science bring values with them and their personal interpretations are foundation enough for the advancement of knowledge and the governance of societies.

Under other epistemologies, like those of Descartes or Hume, uncertainty was seen as an unacceptable obstacle. Without a correct interpretation of laws, how can anyone follow them? Without independent data about the world, how can science achieve anything? Kuhn and Fish show what the Hellenistic Skeptics argued: life does not require certainty. Without one true interpretation of law, jurors base their verdicts on their personal values, just as Hart would fear. But Hart failed to see that jurors obviously will value what they think the law means, and hence, will follow precedents. Without any independent standards for science, scientists create theories based upon their values, just as Descartes would have feared. However, scientists value reproducibility, accuracy, utility, and all of the other ideas that

Descartes imagines could exist only with certainty; hence, theories based on the values of scientists function with much the same reliability as theories based on the assumption of certainty.

Incommensurability

Incommensurability is a central idea in Kuhn and Fish, although more explicitly in Kuhn. Only in places where contradictory ideas are found incommensurable is there a place for judgment. Commensurable laws and paradigms assume a universal method of judging between contradictory interpretations or paradigms, but without any such method—and uncertainty assumes that such a method does not exist—there is no way to avoid incommensurability. However, as long as ideas remain commensurable, whatever reasoning system is already in effect will remain in place. Therefore, for Kuhn especially, but also for Fish, incommensurability is prerequisite for discovery and advancement.

In other words, until a paradigm is faced with another incommensurable paradigm, no changes can be made to the basic foundations of a theory. Where incommensurability arises in the form of anomalous data and rival explanations, the values and assumptions of rival theories must be questioned. Without incommensurability, the only advancement will occur within the bounds of previous assumptions. Therefore, incommensurability is the opening that allows knowledge to transcend currently held assumptions. And uncertainty implies that all assumptions—all ideas in fact—are open for renegotiation.

Judgment

While uncertainty is the central idea of Skepticism, and incommensurability is the driving force for advancing knowledge under Skepticism, the key idea to making Skepticism

tenable is judgment. The greatest obstacle to Skepticism has always been its seeming inability to explain how good decisions are made and how judgment successfully addresses uncertainty. While Fish argues that interpretation or individual judgment is unavoidable in law, the key to his argument is showing that individual judgment need not be capricious. Equally so, the key to Kuhn's argument is that it explains how science advances through good judgments.

Without the notion that individual judgments and interpretations contain good values, criteria, and reasoning, neither Kuhn's nor Fish's argument would be persuasive. Laws have obvious benefits and any explanation of them that makes them seem no different from "*omni contra omnes*" will fail to persuade (TL 1172). The achievements of science surround us; so any explanation of science must account for them. Judgment allows Skepticism to account for these achievements. Although Fish's juror and Kuhn's scientist have no access to universal truth, they can still make decisions based on their conception of fairness, justice, utility, reproducibility, and all other goals deemed crucial for good reasoning.

Conclusion

In this paper I have argued that by doubting the value of truth, the Skeptical tradition, in its ancient and modern forms, has made a defensible case for living in a world without certainty. Moreover, the Skepticism of the Hellenistic Skeptics and Nietzsche provides a theoretical basis for postmodern rhetoric, such as the theories of Kuhn and Fish, because once uncertainty is accepted, discourse becomes the basis for human knowledge. Therefore, rhetoric, the study of discourse, becomes fundamental in the search for answers in any field, and Hikins' claim that Nietzsche's Skepticism inspired so much of postmodern rhetoric is no surprise.

Finally, while an understanding of Skeptical rhetoric through uncertainty, incommensurability, and judgment can explain the ascendancy of rhetoric in the postmodern world, it also suggests new avenues of research. Judgment especially seems inadequately understood. The understanding and improvement of judgments between incommensurable theories in an uncertain world remains a pressing question and a promising source of future rhetorical research.

Bibliography

- Annas, Julia and Jonathan Barnes. *The Modes of Skepticism*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985.
- Aristotle. *Rhetoric*. Trans. W. Rhys Roberts. Ed. Friedrich Solmsen. *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present*. Eds. Patrica Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg. New York: Bedford/ St. Martin's, 2001. 179-240.
- Bernstein, Richard J. *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983.
- Burnyeat, Myles. "Can the Sceptic Live his Scepticism?" *Doubt and Dogmatism: Studies in Hellenistic Epistemology*. Ed. Malcolm Schofield, Myles Burnyeat, and Jonathan Barnes. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980. 20-53.
- Burnyeat, Myles. Introduction. *The Skeptical Tradition*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983. 1-8.
- Cicero. *Academica*. Latin text and Trans. H. Rackham. London: Harvard University Press, 1933.
- Fish, Stanley. *Doing What Comes Naturally: Change, Rhetoric, and the Practice of Theory in Literary and Legal Studies*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1989.
- Groarke, Leo. *Greek Skepticism: Anti-Realist Trends in Ancient Thought*. London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990.
- Hikins, James W. "The Seductive Waltz: Rhetoric and Contemporary Interpretations of Nietzsche." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 85 (1999): 380-99.

- Hume, David. *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. Ed. Tom L. Beauchamp. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Kuhn, Thomas S. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. 3rd ed. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996.
- Long, A.A. *Hellenistic Philosophy: Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics*. 2nd ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986.
- Nehamas, Alexander. *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Antichrist*, Trans. Walter Kaufman in *The Portable Nietzsche*. New York: Viking Penguin, 1968. 568-656.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil*. Trans. Walter Kaufman in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*. New York: The Modern Library, 2000. 191-435.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Ecce Homo*. Trans. Walter Kaufman in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*. New York: The Modern Library, 2000. 673-792.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Friedrich Nietzsche on Rhetoric and Language*. Ed. and trans. Sander Gilman, Carole Blair, and David Parent. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Human All-Too-Human*. Trans. Marion Faber and Stephen Lehmann. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *On the Genealogy of Morals*. Trans. Walter Kaufman in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*. New York: The Modern Library, 2000. 449-599.

- Nietzsche, Friedrich. "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense." Ed. and Trans. Daniel Breazeale. *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present*. Eds. Patrica Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg. New York: Bedford/ St. Martin's, 2001. 1171-1179.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Twilight of the Idols*, Trans. Walter Kaufman in *The Portable Nietzsche*. New York: Viking Penguin, 1968. 465-563.
- Plato. "The Apology." *The Works of Plato*. Trans. Jowett. Ed. Irwin Edman. New York: The Modern Library, 1956.
- Sedley, David. "The Motivation of Greek Skepticism." *The Skeptical Tradition*. Ed. Myles Burnyeat. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983.